

The Miami Herald

Posted on Thu, May. 31, 2012

Advocate for blind helps get audio timers at intersections

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The Miami Herald



ALLISON DIAZ / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Luz Marina Rosenfeld, age 54, walks with her guide dog Chelsea, age 4, around Doral Park Country Club on Thursday, May 17, 2012. Rosenfeld lost her eyesight 16 months ago after suffering a stroke and has turned into an advocate for the blind since then working to make the city of Doral more blind friendly.

It's been about 16 months since Luz Rosenfeld lost her vision.

In that time, the 54-year-old Doral resident has enrolled at Florida College of Natural Health to become a massage therapist and has learned how to live an independent lifestyle by working with the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind.

"I can do anything you can do, except drive and see," said Rosenfeld, who lost her vision gradually due to a retinal artery occlusion.

Since losing her eyesight Rosenfeld has also become an advocate for the blind and visually impaired.

The installation of audio pedestrian countdown timers at two Doral intersections was one of the first projects Rosenfeld tackled. The timers are designed to tell pedestrians when it is safe to cross.

"I want people to know being blind is not the end of the road," Rosenfeld said.

Prior to the audio pedestrian countdown timers, Rosenfeld sometimes had to run across NW 102nd Avenue and NW 52nd Street, as well as NW 82nd Avenue and NW 12th Street, because she didn't have enough time to cross.

"I have the right like anyone else to cross the street," said Rosenfeld, who often walks with the

help of her Chelsea, a 4-year-old golden retriever.

"She brought it to my attention, and I said, 'Look, these are county roads,' and we contacted the county Public Works department and began the process," said Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez. "We wanted to help Luz and others with vision problems."

The county installed the audio system, according to Eric Carpenter, Doral's Public Works director.

Rosenfeld can also take credit for improvements to the city's trolley system after she missed the trolley, as well as her stop, because she didn't know when to get off.

"We have worked with trolley drivers to make sure they are cognitive of the needs of those individuals," said Carpenter, adding that trolley drivers will provide assistance to blind and visually impaired riders while getting on and off the trolley and let those riders know when they have arrived at their stop.

"We want to make public transportation and the city infrastructure friendly for everyone," Carpenter said. "We've had people who've reached out to us for wheelchair accessibility, but she was the first person I have spoken to who was visually impaired. It was good to hear a different perspective."

For her next project, Rosenfeld hopes to work with the city to get caution signs alerting drivers of blind and visually impaired pedestrians at intersections.

She has other improvement ideas in the works, as well.

Ultimately, Rosenfeld's goal is to have blind and visually impaired Doral residents become more active in the community.

"When people lose their vision, they lose part of themselves," said Rosenfeld, adding that many blind people will stay inside their homes or only leave the home when accompanied by someone. "You lose a lot, even your pride, because people think so little of you. You have to remind them that you can do the same things they can do, just without vision."

Rosenfeld is able to put on her makeup, write emails, shop for groceries and pick out her clothes on her own and wants other blind and visually impaired people to gain the same sense of independence.

"I learned the hard way that if you don't speak up, no one else will," Rosenfeld said.